

4Getting StartedCore Concepts for Social Justice Education

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This chapter is a bridge that connects the frameworks in the first three chapters with the specific ism chapters that follow. In it, we present core concepts that instructors and facilitators can use in taking a social justice education (SJE) approach. We urge instructors to review the core concepts and design presented in this chapter as a “prequel” to the chapters that follow. This chapter provides generic material for setting up and introducing a course or workshop and notes for processing activities.

We do not claim that these core concepts are the only way to approach SJE. Even the authors in this volume think about and use these core concepts differently. We encourage readers to consider other frameworks or perspectives that support their understanding of social justice as they develop their own SJE practice.

The core concepts, design, and activities are intended to be used by instructors and facilitators in two different ways. First, the material in this chapter can introduce participants to core concepts that will shape their SJE approach to one or more specific social justice isms. Second, the chapter components can be used as a stand-alone introductory approach to SJE without application to any specific ism. If used as an introduction to one or more isms, these core concepts should be introduced up front and then elaborated in connection to each ism addressed in the course or workshop series. Used this way, the concepts have a cumulative impact for participants as they apply the core concepts to each new social justice issue, and grasp the analytic value of these concepts and their application to multiple SJE topics.

Part 1 of this chapter presents seven core concepts that we consider key to the SJE approach described in Chapter 1. Part 2 introduces a sample for teaching the core concepts as an introduction to one or more isms or as a stand-alone class or workshop, along with an explanation of the pedagogical rationale for the design. Part 3 examines facilitation issues likely to emerge when addressing the core concepts during a class or workshop, with recommendations about ways to anticipate and address them.

Part I: Core Concepts of Our Approach to SJE

All of the seven core concepts presented below are equally important. The sequence in which they are listed reflects our preferences for how and when they appear in overview SJE courses (and in the sample design that follows). The concepts we consider “core” for an introduction to SJE or for a stand-alone SJE course or workshop are:

- The differences between an SJE approach and a diversity approach;
- The pervasiveness of systems of oppression at all levels of social organization;
- The social construction and historical legacies of oppression;
- The socialization process by which oppression is learned and reproduced;



Individual and group identities in the context of socially constructed categories and positionalities of privilege and disadvantage;

- Intersectionality among social identities, social group memberships and institutional forms of oppression;
- The importance of critical awareness, knowledge, and skills to challenge, resist, and take effective action for change.

We find these core concepts to be effective for introducing social justice issues to a variety of participant groups. We are also aware that different social justice approaches use different core concepts and terminology. In some contexts, instructors and facilitators may want to also help participants explore different terminology and their implications. For example, some instructors, facilitators, and/or participants may be more familiar with terms and frameworks such as patriarchy, misogyny, false consciousness, post-colonialism, post-structuralism, neo-liberalism, Marxism, or criticality. Different sets of terminology offer different entry points and frameworks, and emphasize different perspectives and modes of analysis. Such concepts can be incorporated or set alongside the SJE approach described here and will generate fruitful discussions.

Differences Between Diversity and Social Justice Approaches

A *diversity* approach generally emphasizes the social, cultural, and other differences and commonalities among social identity groups based on the ethnic, racial, religious, gender, class, or other “social categories” generally recognized within the U.S. (These will differ transnationally as well as historically.) The goals of a diversity approach include appreciation of differences among and within groups in a pluralistic society.

A diversity approach does not necessarily include issues of inequality as fundamental to the ways in which diversity is experienced in the U.S. It is also unlikely to address the ways in which social group differences have been used historically and in the present day to rationalize and justify the damage done by inequality and injustice within the larger society, or the ways in which privileges and disadvantages are situated within a larger context of systemic inequality and oppression.

For example, a diversity approach might focus on understanding the cultural values, religious affiliations, educational experiences, families, national and language origins for specific ethnic groups, like Puerto Rican or Mexican Latinos/as, or U.S.-born African Americans, or Afro-Caribbeans (Cubans, Dominicans, Haitians). Yet this approach often remains silent on the biases and daily microaggressions people from these groups encounter, the pervasive discrimination in employment and educational tracking, and the systemic disadvantages these groups face within the system of U.S. racism.

Similarly, discussions on religion framed by a diversity approach may focus on the beliefs and modes of worship of different faith traditions. They usually do not consider how U.S. Christian hegemony creates disadvantage for religious or nonreligious groups in the U.S. who are not identified as Christian. Members of these groups may experience daily microaggressions if their faith requires that they cover their heads (Jewish men wearing a kippa, Muslim women wearing hijab, Sikhs wearing turbans), they may have difficulty getting time off to observe holidays, and they may be pressured to participate in Christian holidays and rituals.

In contrast, *social justice education* focuses attention on the ways in which social group differences of race and ethnicity, national origins, language, religion, gender, sexuality, class, disability, and age interact with systems of domination and subordination to privilege or disadvantage different social group members relative to each other. We use the term

social justice education as distinct from diversity education to capture an emphasis upon unequal social structures, supremacist ideologies, and oppressive politics and practices by which members of dominant social groups, whether knowingly or unconsciously, perpetuate their own social and cultural privilege to the disadvantage of marginalized or subordinated social groups.

An SJE approach is based on a vision of society organized upon principles of social justice, and draws on a theory of oppression to analyze the ways in which societies fall short of such a vision (see [Chapter 1](#); Adams, 2014; Rawls, 2003; Sen, 2009; Young, 1990). The goals of an SJE approach include awareness and understanding of oppression, acknowledgement of one's role in that system (as a privileged or disadvantaged social group member), and a commitment to develop the skills, resources, and coalitions needed to create lasting change.

Structural Inequality Occurs at Every Level of Society: Individual, Institutional, and Societal/Cultural

Structural inequality plays out and can be analyzed at every level of social organization, from the most individual and personal, to the most abstract and societal. The terms that we use in this book—individual, institutional, and societal/cultural—refer to the levels of social organization at which inequality is maintained and reproduced.

The individual level refers to persons in themselves and in relationship with others; it includes “internalized” understandings of privilege or inequality within a person's individual consciousness as well as attitudes and behaviors that play out interpersonally.

The institutional level refers to social institutions such as schooling, banking and finance, and criminal justice institutions that enforce the law and political institutions that create the law. The institutional level can also refer to smaller units within larger institutions or organizations, such as a particular school district, a particular classroom within a school system, or a police department or prison within the larger legal system.

The cultural and societal levels refer to the broad abstract understandings that pervade a social system. At the cultural level, we examine prevailing norms and values that govern communication style, gender roles, family structure, expectations of physical and mental capacities, relationship to time and place, aesthetic standards, and more. The term *norm* means that certain ways of being are viewed as correct and *normal* while differences are defined as wrong, unhealthy, or *abnormal*. Culture is not one thing, but an aggregate of many norms, expectations, attitudes, and behaviors that are expressed by individuals and institutions. Likewise, society is an aggregate of institutions that reproduce attitudes and values from the dominant culture, and in their cumulative interactions convey the feeling that one is living within a cohesive system that can be described as *society*.

We find the three levels—individual, institutional, and societal/cultural—useful for drawing general distinctions among levels of social organization, and for describing interactions among them. For some groups of participants, these terms may not seem sufficiently nuanced. They may want additional terms to differentiate between the intrapersonal (within the self) and interpersonal (between several individuals), or to describe the dynamics within groups of people (such as a working group, a club, or a family) that are too small or informal to be “institutional” and yet often are the groupings within which the policies and practices of an institution get understood, carried out, and rewarded. Similarly, it may seem difficult to grasp the meaning of “the culture” or “the society” except through the interplay of specific institutional players such as the media, the rhetoric deployed by politicians running for public office, or the policies and practices that provide or prevent access to health care or school systems or safe neighborhoods.

Social psychologists, sociologists, and social workers describe both the individual and small-group interrelations as *micro* and differentiate these from *meso* (schools, organizations, or communities) and *macro* (the overarching economic, cultural, social, and legal dimensions of social structure). These terms can help to elucidate more subtle distinctions, but they are generally not interchangeable on a one-to-one basis with the terms individual, institutional, and cultural/societal as we use them here (Kirk & Okazawa-Rey, 2013). We call attention to these different terminologies because instructor/facilitators may find one or the other more useful depending upon context. For the purpose of describing social organization, we rely on the terms individual, institutional, and societal/cultural, while acknowledging that any single set of terms chosen to describe something as complex as social organization will remain incomplete.

The dynamics of an overarching cultural and societal system of inequality that is maintained and reproduced institutionally and by individuals can be envisioned as a three-dimensional “cube” (Hardiman, Jackson, & Griffin, 2007) as shown in Fig. 4.1.

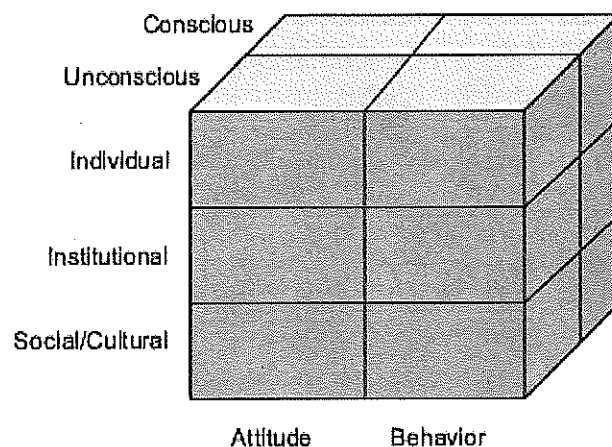


Figure 4.1 Three-Dimensional Matrix of Oppression

Source: Hardiman, R., Jackson, B. W., & Griffin, P. (2013).

The “cube” captures the three horizontally drawn levels (cultural, institutional, individual) described above, and complicates those levels with two additional factors: The difference between attitudes and behaviors, and the distinction between conscious and unconscious. It is obvious that individuals can have conscious and unconscious beliefs and behaviors; likewise, institutions have attitudes (policies) and behaviors (practices) that may be conscious or unconscious (i.e., official or unofficial) and which create advantage or disadvantage for members of different social identity groups. The distinctions between attitudes and behaviors, conscious and unconscious, also play out at the abstract levels of culture and society. This visual representation is a useful pedagogical tool to help participants see how these levels intersect (Hardiman, Jackson, & Griffin, 2007, p. 39).

The Individual Level

At the individual level, the focus is on understanding the individual attitudes and behaviors that maintain one or more forms of oppression, intentionally or unintentionally. Because these attitudes and behaviors are learned through processes of socialization, the cycle of socialization, which we address later in this chapter, is a useful conceptual organizer.

Terminology at the individual level: Conscious and unconscious, attitude and behavior, stereotype, implicit bias, microaggression, prejudice.

At the individual level, we use terms like *bias* and *prejudice* to refer to negative attitudes toward marginalized or excluded groups. These attitudes are often based on unexamined *stereotypes*, or overly generalized assumptions and beliefs about groups of people that are embedded in the dominant culture and that many people reproduce through their attitudes and behaviors. These stereotypes may be negative (women are too emotional and not good at math) or they may seem positive (Asians are unemotional and good at math), but in both cases, they “essentialize” everyone in the social identity group based on partial information, misinformation, or missing information.

Although often based on a kernel of truth, stereotypes are inaccurate and damaging in several ways. First, the kernel of truth on which a stereotype is based is often taken out of historical context and exaggerated. For example, the stereotype that Jews are “clannish”—i.e., prefer to socialize with other Jews—does not consider the history of forced isolation of European Jews in walled ghettos for many centuries. Without this context, the characterization makes light of a long history of violent relocation by implying that its cultural ripple effects are mere matters of preference.

Second, stereotypes often target one group based on a characteristic that is shared by many other groups who aren’t targeted thus. Continuing the example above, in cities (where new immigrants moved to be close to acquaintances from the “old country”), there are still neighborhoods that are primarily inhabited by people of Irish, Italian, or Polish descent, and many in these groups prefer “in-marriage” rather than “intermarriage” for their children, but they are not called “clannish.” The stereotype applies a value judgement to Jews in particular for an ethnic-centered communalism typical of many other communities.

Third, stereotypes overgeneralize and ignore diversity within a group. Contrary to the stereotype, most Jews socialize widely with non-Jews and many intermarry with non-Jews. But the stereotype is leveraged against all Jews (even those who are not European and have no particular relationship to this stereotype’s historical reference), whether or not its characterization describes them. Thus, the stereotype erases historical legacies of oppression, assigns judgement to one group for behavior that is considered unproblematic for other groups, and is grossly inaccurate in attributing to all what might be the understandable behavior of some.

Stereotypes are reinforced by selective attention to behaviors that match stereotypes and ignore or rationalize behaviors that contradict them. For example, when a man of color mugs someone, his behavior may be interpreted as typical of his group and magnified by media attention. When a white person commits a similar crime, their behavior is usually interpreted as an individual fault or outlier, not part of a broader pattern and not worthy of much media attention. Similarly, when a Muslim person plans or commits an attack, they are labeled “terrorist” and their behavior is interpreted as stemming from their religious tradition. Meanwhile, white Christian men (who commit the majority of mass shootings in the U.S.) are seen as individual actors, and their behavior is attributed to mental illness or a response to personal feelings of alienation, rather than ascribed to their race and/or religion. The media is quick to label them “lone wolves.”

Examples of individual-level attitudes and behaviors, based on stereotypes, that contribute to oppression include:

- The belief that women are available for sexual attention and/or sex in the workplace and other public and private spaces, including the belief that women “ask for it” by their dress or demeanor, along with behaviors that violate women’s boundaries based on these assumptions;
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An implicit bias against black or Latino men that includes the belief they are dangerous and criminal, reflected in women holding their purses close to their bodies and drivers shutting car windows and locking the doors as they drive through a poor, racially marked neighborhood;

- The assumption that people with physical disabilities have impaired thinking, or that all elders are hard of hearing, and the behavior of speaking differently to them than one would to a presumed-able younger adult;
- The belief that all gay men are promiscuous, and related behaviors such as invalidating gay men's partnerships or doubting their ability to interact appropriately with children.

We differentiate at all levels between attitudes and behaviors, but it is not always clear where the line between conscious or unconscious might fall. Someone may be conscious of their behavior but not realize that it is based on an unconscious attitude, or they may be conscious of a particular attitude without recognizing its connection to an unconscious stereotype. The research on *implicit bias* offers a useful analytic tool to understand the *impact* of biases, whether conscious or unconscious. Individuals (as well as institutions) often deny their *intention* to discriminate, but research demonstrates that implicit biases inform attitudes and shape behaviors (Banaji & Greenwald, 2013; Kirwan Institute, 2013). Sometimes an implicit bias or unconscious stereotype rises into conscious thought at the moment we catch ourselves acting upon it.

Microaggressions are a particular kind of individual-level behavior. These are commonplace, everyday interactions that intentionally or unintentionally reinforce a person's subordinated status within a system of oppression (Sue, 2010). Members of marginalized groups experience a cumulative impact from the barrage of behaviors that express stereotyped assumptions and biases from members of privileged groups (Sue 2010; Huber & Solórzano, 2014). For example:

- At a predominantly white college, a black student in a single day might overhear racial slurs, have someone question whether they got unauthorized help on a well-written paper, be left out of an invitation to a team meeting, or ignored at a social gathering.
- A low-income student may overhear disparaging remarks about poor people, encounter friends' assumptions that everyone in the group has middle-class privilege, get invited to participate in a valuable extracurricular learning experience for which they can't afford the fee, or be told that the way they speak in informal settings makes them sound unintelligent.
- A transgender person may be called the wrong pronouns, asked what their "real" name is, stared at, asked inappropriately personal questions about their anatomy, or told that they're in the "wrong" restroom.

These experiences, amplified by repetition and reinforcement in the institutions and the culture at large, result in cumulative experiences of racism, classism, or trans* oppression that are far more powerful than each seemingly insignificant interaction would suggest.

Internalized Subordination and Domination

An important dimension of domination and subordination is the "intrapyschic" or intrapersonal ways they operate within an individual, usually unconsciously. *Internalized subordination* refers to ways in which members of marginalized and disadvantaged groups, through their socialization, internalize the dominant group's negative ideology about their

group, and come to accept a definition of themselves that is hurtful and limiting, causing them to think, feel, and act in ways that accept the devaluation of their group. For example, a woman on a hiring committee may doubt the credentials or abilities of women applicants while accepting the qualifications of men without question. Internalized subordination also operates when target group members curry favor with dominant group members and distance themselves from their own group. For example, some people with disabilities that are not readily apparent may distance themselves from people with more apparent disabilities in an attempt to escape stigma (see [Chapter 9](#), Ableism).

Internalized domination describes the behaviors, thoughts, and feelings of privileged or advantaged group members who, through their socialization, have learned to think and act in ways that express entitlement and privilege. Because the advantages of privileged groups have been normalized culturally, members of privileged groups see the resources and opportunities they get as the natural order of things, rather than as a result of a social system that provides them with advantages denied to other social groups (McIntosh, 1989).

Examples of internalized domination include:

- Men unthinkingly talk over and interrupt women in conversation, while simultaneously labeling women as chatty.
- White people who are native speakers of English expect that they will be treated well and accommodated in public spaces, but without a thought cut in front of people of color waiting in line, or demand to be waited on first when a new speaker of English takes time at the cash register.

Internalized domination is supported by all the mechanisms of socialization, and particularly by an educational system that renders disadvantaged group members invisible or devalued by failing to acknowledge their contributions or importance (Loewen, 1995).

One further dimension of oppression that occurs primarily at the individual level can be described as *horizontal oppression*. This term comes from the terms “horizontal violence” and “horizontal hostility,” used by Pharr (1997) to describe the situations in which members of marginalized or subordinated groups misdirect their rage at other members of their own group rather than at the more dangerous and powerful members of advantaged groups. For example, a woman may make sexist remarks about another woman’s attire, or a working-poor parent may discourage a child from pursuing higher education and instead tell them to accept their future role as an underpaid provisional worker.

Horizontal oppression also works within and among advantaged groups. For example, white people may cast aspersions on white organizations or individuals that are working for racial justice, Christians may discourage other Christians from educating themselves about non-Christian religious communities, or children who do not have disabilities may tease other children for making friends with a child who does have a disability.

Horizontal and vertical manifestations of oppression can be mutually reinforcing. For example, in the early years of the U.S. labor movement, stereotypes and hostility about subordinated racial groups and newly arrived immigrants were used to break up unionizing efforts among mill and factory workers. Vertical hostility across race was used to foment horizontal violence and exclusion within the working class.

The Institutional Level

At the institutional level, oppression is produced, reproduced, and maintained by the policies and practices of institutions such as government agencies, business and industry, banking and finance, K-12 and post-secondary education, religious organizations, and the legal

system (including divorce and custody law, mechanisms of inheritance such as wills and trusts, police and criminal courts, civil fines, and prisons). The *institutional level* refers both to broad fields such as health care and the media, and to specific organizations such as a sports team or a congregation. Institutions maintain and reproduce advantage and disadvantage by whom they employ, how they recognize and reward success, and whose transgressions they punish. The policies and practices of privilege or exclusion reflect such institutional norms.

The relationship between individual bias and institutional discrimination is complex. On one hand, institutions reinforce the socialization of individuals into systems of oppression through discriminatory policies and practices. On the other hand, individual attitudes or behaviors are often the vehicles by which a discriminatory institutional policy is carried out. For example, a career counselor in a high school where students are tracked into separate Advanced Placement and vocational tracks may evaluate the potential for college bound vs. vocational students based on their own implicit biases or prejudices about students' family background, neighborhood, or use of accented or vernacular English. In such a case, the counselor's implicit biases based on race and class (individual level) play out through the school's tracking system (institutional level) to produce long-term, material, and discriminatory consequences for student access to higher education and employment. Counselors who become aware of their implicit biases can choose to avoid individual-level discrimination, but in order to address the institutional level, they must work to change policies and practices as well as their own behavior.

Examples of discriminatory institutional practices and policies include:

- Dress codes for front office or sales positions that advantage people who meet dominant beauty norms and disadvantage those who do not (including people with disabilities, people perceived as gay or queer, and people who wear ethnically or religiously marked attire such as head coverings);
- Workplace schedules that institute mandatory days off for major Christian holidays, while non-Christians who want time off for their religious holidays must file a request and use vacation time or unpaid leave;
- Health insurance policies that specifically exclude transition-related health care for trans* people even when the same medications and procedures are covered for cisgender people;
- Youth curfews restricting people under an age threshold from being in public spaces during certain times of the day.

Often, oppression plays out in institutions at both institutional and individual levels. A discriminatory policy exists at the institutional level, but an individual must carry it out. Or, an individual acts based on an implicit bias, and the impact of their behavior is magnified by their institutional role as a manager or policy maker. The lack of safeguards to prevent decision makers' individual bias from governing institutional policies and practices is itself an example of institutional-level oppression.

Oppressive policies and practices are often difficult to notice, because they seem built-in, inevitable features of monolithic structures. For example, many application and intake forms require people to indicate gender and provide only two options. This practice, along with the broader norm of assuming that sex and gender are binary, is so pervasive that most people do not notice it. But for people who are trans* and/or intersex, it means they may be required to misrepresent themselves or be excluded entirely.

Institutional-level oppression can go unnoticed because many oppressive policies seem neutral at first glance. Often they do not state an explicit discriminatory intent, yet their impact reinforces inequality. For example, college admissions policies reward applicants

for extracurricular experiences, such as volunteer activities or travel abroad, that are only available to people with significant class privilege. Such policies do not explicitly say that the college wishes to prioritize wealthy applicants, and the policies may be rationalized by seemingly reasonable explanations. Still, the impact is to disadvantage applicants from poor and working-class backgrounds whose need to work prevents volunteer activity or travel, while advantaging those from professional and owning-class backgrounds.

Unofficial institutional practices, such as norms of dress, appearance, communication, group interaction, and self-presentation are generally not apparent to people in privileged groups because they have always “fit in” with the organizational culture. For members of marginalized groups, however, the daily experiences of trying to figure out or being reminded that they don’t match accepted norms contributes to the cumulative impact of oppression.

The Societal and Cultural Level

Social systems and cultural norms convey messages about what is correct and expected by the larger society. In an oppressive society, the superior position of the privileged and advantaged groups is maintained and reproduced both through the networks of institutions that make up the society, and through unquestioned belief systems and norms that support and give meaning to those systems.

For excluded and marginalized peoples, the cultural norms and structural obstacles they experience at local banks, hospitals, police forces, realtors, and schools convey a seamless web of oppression that presses on them everywhere they turn. This web, although made up of specific institutions and interactions, becomes an overwhelming cultural and societal force. The reproduction of cultural norms and structural patterns “add up” to a system of advantage and disadvantage that is much larger than the sum of its parts.

Dominant norms and practices take place at a societal and cultural level, although their specific manifestations are most clear at the institutional level. It can be difficult for participants in social justice courses and workshops to make meaningful distinctions between these two levels. The point is not to categorize each example as one level or the other, but rather to strive to hold an understanding that examples at the individual and institutional levels interact and reinforce each other and are upheld by broader cultural/societal patterns and structures.

Examples of cultural norms and societal practices include:

- Policies that prevent gay or lesbian couples from adopting children because of the cultural norm that heterosexual couples are the only “good” parents;
- The often-repeated belief that female survivors of rape provoked their rapists through their dress or behavior;
- The ubiquitous practice of building new homes that are not accessible to people with mobility impairments;
- The culturally reinforced reluctance to vote for non-Christian politicians (including atheists) because of an assumption that only religious people can be trusted to act morally.

Oppression is Socially Constructed by Historical Legacies Embedded in Institutions and Belief Systems

Today’s oppression grows out of the legacy of yesterday’s accumulated and persistent inequality. Many contemporary manifestations of oppression gain strength from the assumption that something “has always been done this way.” When we examine historical

legacies, we better understand how different manifestations of oppression evolved as they did, and why they have persisted. We can also begin to imagine how things might have turned out differently. Novelist William Faulkner's famous statement, "The past is never dead. It's not even past" conveys this sense of the continuity of history and why we must dig deep into the past if we are to build a better future.

The term *social construction* refers to the idea that norms, ideas, and institutions that may now seem natural or inevitable actually grew out of specific historical and social processes. When, as children, we learn norms around respectful communication between children and adults, acceptable behavior in public and private spaces, and expectations of men and women, these norms seem absolute. But in fact they vary across cultures and shift over time within cultures. Abstract ideas like democracy, peace, and romantic love are socially constructed, as are the very concepts on which social identity categories are based—race, ethnicity, sex, gender, sexual orientation, disability, childhood, and adulthood.

The social construction of institutions is perhaps easier to trace, because we can often point to a discrete beginning. Institutions emerge in specific contexts, driven by the goals and interests of individuals and groups with the power to implement their decisions at those times. From the perspective of the present, institutions like K–12 schooling, health care based in hospitals and clinics, or the apparatus of representative democracy seem to be settled matters of fact. But U.S. public schools were created in the early 19th century (Fraser, 1999). Hospitals are a recent invention, only replacing doctors' house calls in the mid-20th century after the practice and technology of health care had become so specialized that it required bringing patients to designated buildings. Our system of representative democracy was outlined at the founding of the country but has undergone significant evolution as groups fought to be included, and as the electoral campaign process was transformed by technologies of mass media and a shifting economy.

Institutions tend to perpetuate themselves and often outlive their original intentions. For example, long-term incarceration of criminals began in the late 18th century as a well-intentioned alternative to the public humiliation of whipping and hanging, and was the first penal system in the Western world intended to rehabilitate as well as punish. Within less than 100 years, strong evidence showed that incarceration, especially solitary confinement, was in fact more damaging than rehabilitative. But by that time, other institutions had grown up around incarceration that had their own interests to protect (McLennan, 2008), and all of these institutions are more entrenched today. Private prisons contract with states to fill prison beds for profit, unions for prison guards protect their members' job security, outside companies hire prisoners at extremely low wages, and politicians cite incarceration as proof that they are "tough on crime." Questions about whether incarceration diminishes crime, or is appropriate for a particular crime, or is cruel and unusual, or is racially biased, bump up against established institutions and accepted ideas that perpetuate the status quo. Thus, consideration of the historical legacies of social institutions—in connection with why they were established and who now benefits—enables participants to understand how historical and cultural forces shape the manifestations of oppression we see today.

It is often challenging for participants to think about how social identity categories are also social constructions with tangled historical roots. For example, "race" is a complicated social construction that was created and used to subordinate peoples with darker skin color for the purposes of enslavement, economic exploitation, and/or colonization and conquest (see [Chapter 5](#)). The fluidity and instrumental nature of racial categories is captured by the term "racialization"—"*the extension of racial meaning to a previously racially unclassified relationship, social practice, or group*" (Omi & Winant, 2015, p. 111, italics in the original). The process of racialization helps explain how the U.S. has racialized geographically

and historically diverse migrants through a shifting color line that sorts people into a racially stratified workforce (see also [Chapters 7 and 8](#)). Rather than a biological or even purely cultural fact, race is a social fact constructed through legal, economic, cultural, and other forces in the service of creating and maintaining inequality.

In social justice classes and workshops, exploring social construction and historical legacies enables participants to understand that oppression inherited from the past is not immutable or inevitable. With this insight, change becomes not only possible, but also plausible. Freire described the maintenance of oppression “not as a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limiting situation which [we] can transform...[H]umans live in a world which [we] are constantly re-creating and transforming” (Freire, 1970, pp. 31, 79–80).

While oppressive norms, ideas, and institutions are defended on the assumption that they couldn't be any other way, movements of resistance and change are often undermined by the accusation that their ideas are too new and unprecedented. Activists participating in the Occupy movement were acting in the spirit of populist and direct democratic practices that carried forward the U.S. historical tradition of 18th century populist rent revolts (Zinn, 2003) that bear striking resemblance to today's foreclosure resistance projects. Trans* activists are told that trans* issues are difficult to understand because they are so “new,” although in fact trans* people have been organizing and advocating for their rights in the U.S. since the mid-20th century, and people who did not fit into their society's primary gender categories have existed throughout time and across cultures.

Exploring historical legacies of social justice movements can help participants see current social justice work as legitimate and feasible, and inspire them to build upon past efforts to create new openings for social justice. It also creates opportunities for participants to learn from the strategies of past movements, including what worked well and what was problematic. Participants can learn about the importance of coalitions across differences and of intersectional analysis and action, not as buzzwords but as practical and ethical concerns that activists have grappled with over time.

Historical legacies are transnational as well as U.S.-centered, and it is important to understand the interconnections among global and U.S. instances of oppression and resistance. For example, the 20th century Black Consciousness and anti-apartheid movements in South Africa were linked to the civil rights and racial consciousness movements in the U.S. Likewise, 19th and 20th century anti-colonial nationalist movements in Africa, Arabia, and the Americas were inspired in part by anti-colonial aspects of the American Revolution and the anti-monarchy ideas from the French Revolution.

Although the historical legacies described in this volume refer primarily to U.S. manifestations of oppression, they provide a foundation for asking broader questions: How does racism in the U.S. differ from racism elsewhere, and what historical forces led to those differences? How does violence against less-powerful religious group differ from one geographic context to another in the past and present? Especially in classes or workshops with participants who themselves or whose families migrated from outside the U.S., instructors and facilitators will be wise to make room for discussion of how categories like gender, sexuality, race, and religion are constructed differently in other places.

The Role of Socialization and Hegemony in Maintaining Systems of Oppression

Socialization refers to the lifelong process by which we inherit and replicate the dominant norms and frameworks of our society, and learn to accept them as “common sense.” In particular, we learn to think of social identity categories as essential and natural, and of

social hierarchies as inevitable. Our socialization processes rarely point out that our norms perpetuate a world view based upon the maintenance of advantage for some, relative to disadvantage for others.

“The internalization of socially rooted and historically developed activities is the distinguishing feature of human psychology,” in that external events and interpersonal processes are transformed into intrapersonal ones (Vygotsky, 1978, pp. 56–57). This general principle of socialization is the ongoing process by which external activities and processes become reconstituted as part of an interior self applies to the internalization of oppressive activities and processes.

Oppression depends on the internalization and acceptance of advantaged and disadvantaged social group relationships within the social hierarchy of the larger society. Disadvantaged social groups can live within a system of oppression that injures them or deprives them of certain rights without having the language or consciousness (Freire used the term “conscientização”) to name the oppression or to understand their situation as an effect of oppression, rather than the natural order of things. Memmi (1957, 1991) described this as “psychological colonization,” whereby disadvantaged groups internalize their oppressed condition and collude with the oppressive ideology and social system, a process Freire referred to as “playing host to the oppressor” (1970, p. 30).

In this volume, we use a framework called “the Cycle of Socialization” (Harro, 2013a), shown in [Fig. 4.2](#), as a shorthand for the role of institutions in socializing us into oppressive systems from childhood throughout the lifespan.

The cycle signifies the way socializing interactions within our families, schools, peers, and religious institutions, and through the media, are not one-time events, but continue throughout our lives. Our “first socialization” takes place through interactions with members of immediate and extended family, teachers, and other trusted adults. The messages we receive are usually mutually reinforcing, although sometimes contradictory (e.g., between messages received at home and at school). Such contradictions offer space to question received norms.

Socialization continues through interactions with institutions and through cultural messages that are reinforced in adulthood. Through cumulative encounters with social institutions like medical systems, police, courts, banks, and workplaces, we learn the roles we are expected to play in order to navigate institutions successfully as a person with our social identities. Whether consciously or not, we are reminded again and again of how we are privileged and/or disadvantaged relative to others. When we are conscious of being disadvantaged, we may feel that it’s not fair, or if we have advantages, we may accept them as normal and deserved. To the extent that the process is not interrupted, we transmit these norms and assumptions to the next generation, thus perpetuating the cycle.

There are many opportunities for challenging and interrupting socialization into an oppressive system. An encouraging heuristic to explore side-by-side with the Cycle of Socialization (Harro, 2013a) is the Cycle of Liberation (Harro, 2013b). These two models, taken together, indicate how individuals can become conscious of their roles in the system, build skills and knowledge to resist the norms they have learned, and disrupt the cycle on an individual level. At a broader level, social movements can organize resistance to oppressive norms and structures in the larger society. For example, people with disabilities work as individuals and in community to claim a sense of their own value and beauty as people. They also form organizations to advocate for structural and cultural changes that increase opportunities for self-determination and interdependence. Poor and working-class people support each other to resist internalizing messages that they are undeserving, organize to share resources to meet each other’s needs, and advocate for policy changes to increase economic equality. People in privileged roles can break out of the Cycle of Socialization

and choose to become allies and change agents in collaboration with disadvantaged groups (Broido, 2000).

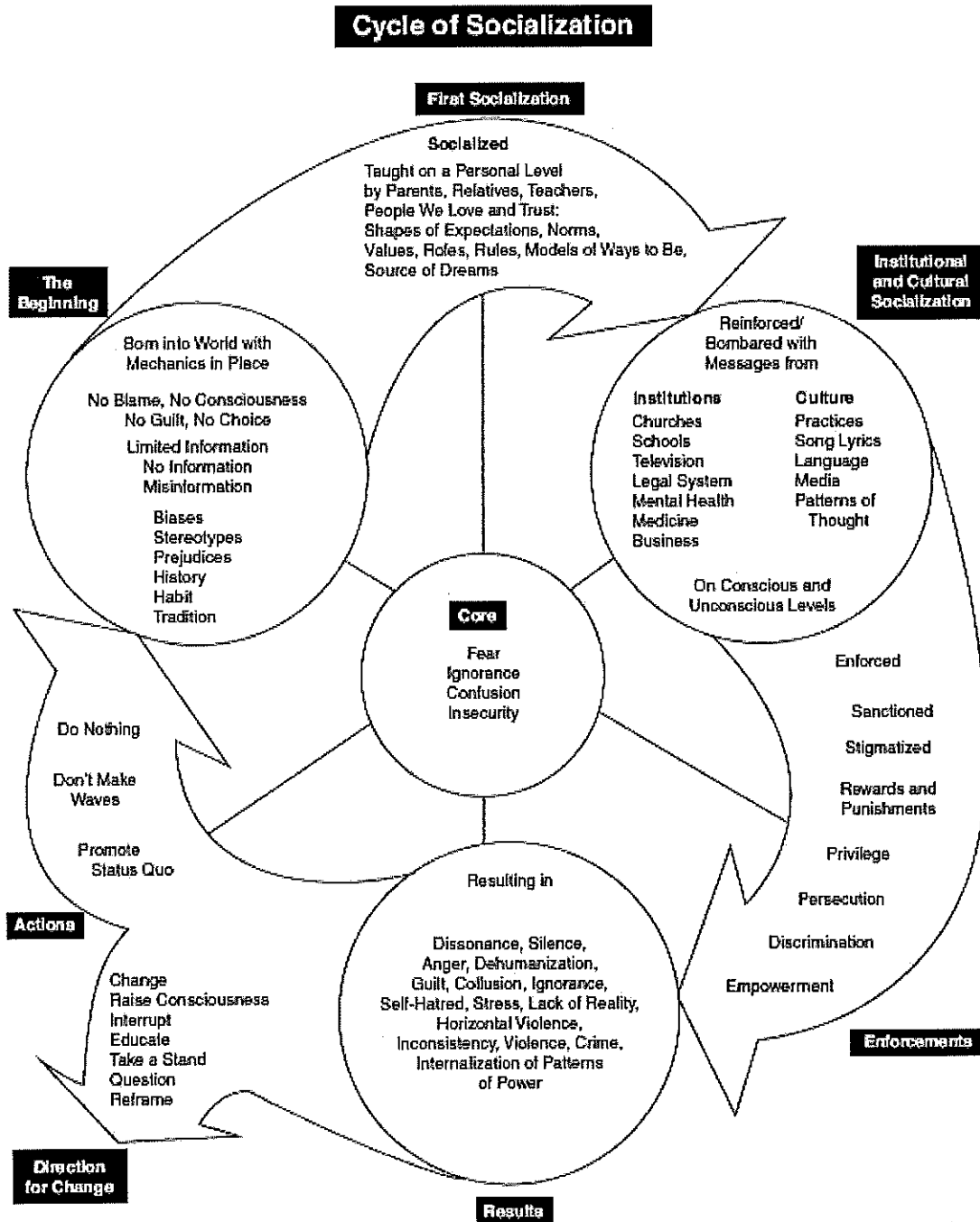


Figure 4.2 Cycle of Socialization
Source: Harro, B. (2013a).

The dominant norms we are socialized to accept can be described as *hegemonic*. Hegemonic norms wield power, because most people behave in accordance with social norms without being told or forced to do so and judge harshly those who behave otherwise. For those who benefit from the norms by virtue of their membership in privileged social groups, going along with business as usual provides unquestioned access to social advantages. One of the subtlest advantages is the ability to see oneself and be seen as “normal,” in contrast with those considered different, strange, alien, or “other.” People are marginalized as “different” relative to the often unnamed, dominant group, and are excluded and

disadvantaged on the basis of that difference (Brookfield, 2005; Johnson, 2006; see also [Chapter 1](#)).

Hegemonic norms are reinforced and sustained at all levels of society, and come to feel compulsory, as if there is no safe way to behave other than the expected norm. This feeling is accompanied by tangible material rewards for conforming and punishments for diverging from the norm.

For example, heterosexuality is an enforced norm. People who are heterosexual don't need to "come out" because it is the assumed default. Individuals and couples who are heterosexual (or perceived as heterosexual) can experience themselves as normal and unremarkable, and encounter institutions designed to meet their needs (at least on the dimension of sexual orientation). If they want to have children through pregnancy or adoption, their fitness as parents is unlikely to be questioned. If it is necessary to make decisions for each other during medical emergencies, they can be confident that hospitals will recognize their right to do so. Meanwhile, people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer are continually reminded that they do not fit the norm, starting with the need for a "coming out" process of realizing and disclosing their sexual orientation. If they want to have children, many people will doubt their fitness as parents, and adoption agencies may legally reject them. When they file for a birth certificate, they may have to amend a form that only has spaces for one mother and one father. Legal documents like health care proxies and wills may be ignored by hospitals and courts that choose not to recognize their relationship.

The pervasive cultural, institutional, and individual reinforcement of heterosexuality as the norm means that most people across identity categories go through life with a more or less conscious understanding that heterosexuals fit the norm while queer, bisexual, lesbian, and gay people do not. Norms form part of a pervasive hegemonic system that can seem enormously difficult to change.

Individuals Experience Privilege and Disadvantage Relative to How They Have Been Categorized Into Social Identity Groups

Each of us has multiple *social group identities* that are based on our *social group memberships*. Both are based on *categories* that are socially constructed and have long roots in established historical legacies, as described above. These categories represent ways of sorting people and establishing privileges or exclusions based solely on their social group memberships. There is almost always a history of injustice behind the establishment of these social categories.

Participants who are not familiar with the idea of *social categories*, *social group memberships*, and *social identities* may confuse these with specific *social roles* (such as parent-child, teacher-student, doctor-patient). Although social roles are also constructed and often are attached to power differences, they are not essentialized to the same extent as social group memberships.

Social group memberships are also not the same as *voluntary club or team memberships* (Republican-Democrat, hockey player-Little League member, volunteer for Big Brothers Big Sisters). One key difference is that we are free to join and leave such groups without feeling or being perceived as a "different person" as a result of the change (unlike when someone undergoes religious conversion or gender transition, for example). There may be overlaps and interactions among one's social group memberships and identity (e.g., as a Latina), social roles (e.g., as a mother, a wife, and a college teacher) and voluntary memberships (e.g., on a Board of Directors for an Upward Bound program). Nevertheless, the distinction is important because of the strength of socially constructed hegemonic meanings attached to social group memberships and identities.

Social categories, social group memberships and social identities. The core concepts of social category and social identity are closely related but not the same. Social categories are socially constructed, with historical legacies, enforced hegemonic meanings, and widespread unquestioned acceptance. Although socially constructed and therefore potentially changeable, social categories and the meaning attached to them tend to remain relatively stable. Thus, we tend to experience our social group memberships as fixed, natural, and inevitable, and accordingly our social identities—how we “identify with” our social group memberships—feel like inherent traits.

Some social group memberships are inherited from our families (such as race and ethnicity) or from the group we are assigned to at birth (such as class and sex). Some are relatively fixed, while others may emerge or change over time. Our social class or terms for ethnic self-identification may change with economic circumstances, migration, political organizing, and other life events that impact our access to resources (Hurtado & Gurin, 2004). People born with no disabilities may acquire a disability through accident, illness, or aging; and all of us start off as children, move as we age into the category of adult, and if we're lucky eventually become elders. Although we often talk about one social identity at a time, in actuality we experience them simultaneously. One is not separately a white person, an elder, and male; one is an old white man. Each unique combination of social identities carries its own social meanings and its own combinations of advantages and disadvantages.

As individuals, we do not choose the hegemonic meanings that are attached to our social group memberships. Yet we do have some degree of agency in how we make meaning of our social identities. For example, members of disadvantaged social groups often contest derogatory terms applied to their group by reclaiming these terms and giving them positive meaning. Hence, the embracing of “queer” by people who see themselves as outside social norms of heterosexuality and/or binary gender, as an affirmative spin on a term that has been used as a negative slur (and is still negative to some people). Similarly, “Black” and “Afro-Latino” have been embraced as positive umbrella terms for communities of color who affirm their African heritage, despite specific ethnic identities they might also claim (African American or Dominican), and in contradiction to the pejorative associations attached to Blackness in the dominant culture.

In addition to reclaiming terms, sometimes communities and movements seek to replace terms whose meanings are offensive, outdated, and/or inaccurate. Shifts in the words groups use to describe themselves, and that may eventually be adopted by government and other institutions, reflect new layers in the construction of social categories. In social justice workshops and courses, we ask that participants become aware of changes in terminology and meanings associated with social group memberships over time. For example, terms like “retarded,” “idiot,” and “feebleminded” originated as medical diagnoses. The terms were used to stigmatize and disenfranchise people within the medical system, in legal proceedings, and in communities. Because of this oppressive history, disability advocates have pushed for a shift to language that is more descriptive, less value-laden, and uses “people first” phrasing to recognize that someone's disability is not the only salient fact about them, such as “people with intellectual disabilities.” In 2010, these efforts gained legal recognition in Rosa's Law, which changed the references to “mental retardation” in many federal statutes to refer instead to “intellectual disability.”

Border identities. Social group categories are often constructed as binary, but the reality of how identities play out, especially across different contexts and settings, is far more complex. Sometimes identities do not fall clearly on one side of an advantaged/disadvantaged binary. We acknowledge this nuance with the idea of *border identities*, identities that border but do not fully fit either category. Examples of border identities include people

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of mixed racial backgrounds, children adopted and raised by parents of a different race than their own, and young adults who are over the age of legal majority but still treated as young or immature.

The concept of “border identity” is open to contestation. For example, bisexual individuals might in some ways be considered to occupy a border location between heterosexuality and gay/lesbian identity. However, many bisexual people see themselves as a specific identity category whose subordinated status is experienced differently from the subordination of gays or lesbians. Similarly, the social identity of multiraciality or mixed-race has emerged as a separate social category, not “in between” dominant and subordinated groups, but rather occupying a unique location with its own specific experiences of domination and subordination. In this redefinition, the concept of border identity makes room for individuals to identify with both their multiple-family heritages and their own lived experiences in an identity category that differs from their parents’ identity category.

Advantage and disadvantage attached to social group membership. In this volume, we present six forms of oppression, each of them based on social categories of advantage and disadvantage—racism; classism; religious oppression; ableism; youth/age oppression; and sexism, heterosexism and transgender oppression (considered together). These isms are rooted in U.S. and global categories of domination and subordination. A central task for instructors and students in justice education courses is to understand, explore, and compare how people are privileged and/or marginalized on the basis of both particular social group memberships and intersecting group memberships.

Almost everyone has some identities that confer advantage (privilege) and others that confer disadvantage. People are often less aware of their advantaged identities and more aware of their disadvantaged identities. The salience of particular identities may also vary depending on context and other factors, but they all matter. For example, Barack Obama is widely referred to as the first black president of the U.S. In addition to being black, he is also male, heterosexual, and Christian; benefits from considerable financial and educational privilege as a lawyer and college professor; and is the biracial son of a white mother. His blackness is salient in public discourse because his success as a leader contradicts many of the dominant associations with blackness, while his privileged identities may seem unremarkable because they are shared with most other political leaders. Yet those privileged identities probably played an important role in securing voters’ confidence in him, even though the privileges they confer are less secure than they would be for a politician who is white. Thus, it is rarely useful to categorize someone simply as advantaged or disadvantaged; instead, we encourage consideration of *how* someone is advantaged and/or disadvantaged by particular social group memberships and combinations of social group memberships.

Privilege. People are often unaware of privileges accorded to them based on dominant social group memberships, because those privileges have been *normalized* to be expected. By contrast, people who are denied the same privileges are often painfully aware of them. Advantaged groups sometimes oppose social justice change efforts because they fear losing privileges that they assume to be their “rights” even though those so-called rights are not enjoyed by everyone. *Privileges* are benefits based on social group membership that are available to some people and not others, and sometimes at the expense of others. Some privileges are material—such as access to adequate health care—while others are nonmaterial—such as the ability to experience oneself as normal and central in society. The concept of *privilege* reminds us that such benefits are not earned, but rather result from social advantage relative to others’ disadvantage (Case, 2013; Johnson, 2006; Kimmel & Ferber, 2009; Wildman, 1996; see also [Chapter 1](#)).

Some examples of privileges include:

- White men can count on being perceived as professional and their expertise as legitimate.
- Heterosexual couples, especially those who conform to norms of gender expression, can count on their relationships being seen as natural.
- Owning-class and professional middle-class young people can make decisions about which career paths to pursue without worrying about supporting themselves or their family members financially.

Many further examples of privilege can be found in each ism chapter.

Social Group Memberships, Identities, and Forms of Oppression Are Intersectional at All Levels

Intersectionality suggests that our various advantaged and disadvantaged social group memberships do not act independent of one another, or in a simply additive way. Rather, they interrelate to create specific experiences of oppression that are not reducible to one or another identity (Crenshaw, 2003; Hankivsky, 2014). For example, people of color who experience racial microaggressions are complicated by gender (for women and for men alike, as well as those whose gender expression is outside the norm), by religion (given the ways that religions associated with the Arab or Asian diaspora are racialized or the Black Church historically kept outside of white Christianity), by class (given the ways in which economic advantage or disadvantage are linked to racial classification), and so on (Cross, 2012; Wijeyesinghe & Jackson, 2012).

Patricia Hill Collins proposes

placing Black women's experiences at the center of analysis...through a both/and conceptual lens of the simultaneity of race, class, and gender oppression and of the need for a humanist vision of community [that] creates new possibilities for an empowering Afrocentric feminist knowledge. Many Black feminist intellectuals have long thought about the world in this way because this is the way we experience the world.

(Collins, 2000, pp. 221–222)

She points out that “a system of interlocking race, class, and gender oppression” for any historical or contemporary context will offer a more accurate and inclusive framework that focuses attention on both the core and the intersecting systems of oppression. “Assuming that each system needs the others in order to function creates a distinct theoretical stance that stimulates [our] rethinking” (Collins, 2000, p. 222). Collins further proposes a “paradigmatic shift” that asks that we think inclusively about other structures of oppression (age, sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity) and conceptualize all such oppression, and resistance, at all three levels “of personal biography; the group or community level of the cultural context created by race, class, and gender; and the systemic level of social institutions” (Collins, 2000, p. 227).

This paradigmatic shift replaces additive or binary models of oppression through models of intersecting axes of race, gender, social class, and other social categories that operate at all three levels of social organization (the individual, cultural, and institutional)—each representing sites of domination as well as potential sites for resistance. But there is a limit to the generalizability of this approach (as in [Fig. 4.3](#)), which is “centered” at the core of intersecting axes. Although this “center” conveys the centrality of any one system of oppression, it generates further inquiry, whether the “center” implies some core identity, a “fixity

or status” that “does not adequately represent the fluidity of identities” for a “self” that is always in process (Holvino, 2012, p. 171). Instead, Holvino further pushes the envelope to reconceptualize identity as “simultaneity,” which means “the *simultaneous processes of identity, institutional and social practices*, which operate concurrently and together to construct people’s identities and shape their experiences, opportunities, and constraints”; and by “*processes of identity practice*,” Holvino means, “the ways in which differences like race, ethnicity, gender, class, and sexuality produce and reproduce particular identities that define how individuals come to see themselves and how others see them” (2012, p. 172, author’s italics). Wijeyesinghe visualizes a de-centered universe of social identities as simultaneously and mutually affecting field forces through gravitational pull (Wijeyesinghe, 2012, pp. 98–99).

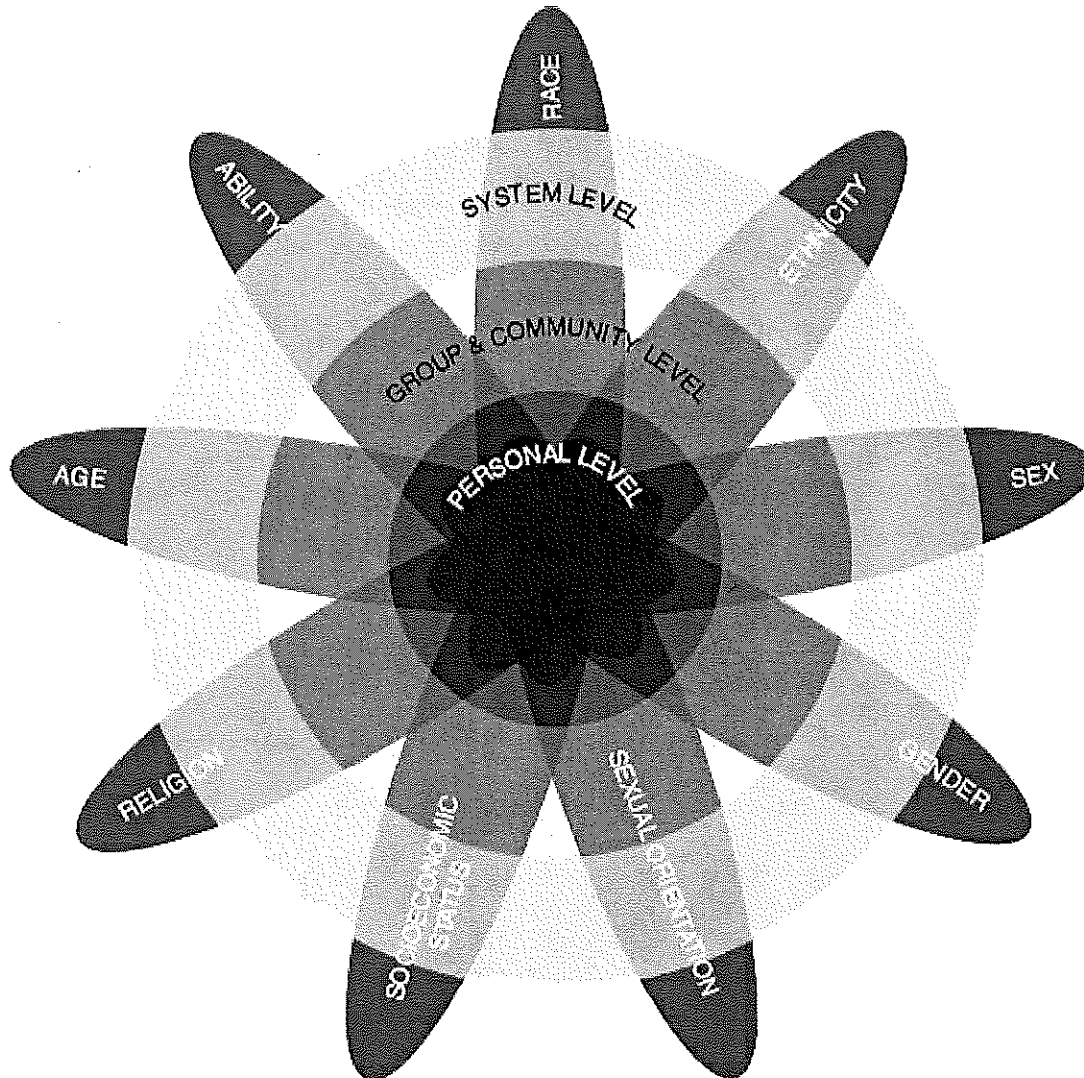


Figure 4.3 Matrix of Interlocking Systems and Levels of Oppression and Resistance

Adapted by Zúñiga, X. & Lee, E. Y. (2015).

Thus, it becomes clear that intersections occur at the same moment not only within personal experience, but also at institutional, systemic, and cultural levels that have impacts in the moment and also across time, affecting individuals and social groups. For example:

- Policies like “stop and frisk,” “three strikes,” and unequal enforcement of drug laws, which disproportionately impact black and brown men and women who are economically disadvantaged;
-

Hiring practices that prioritize academic credentials over life experience, and salary negotiations based on previous salary that tend to benefit people who are white, male, and have relative class privilege;

- Media “handlers” for top-level political candidates who strive to identify their candidates with the middle class, emphasize Christian family values, assume heterosexuality (especially if there is no visible spouse or partner), and downplay the extremes of youth or age.

Each ism chapter in this book foregrounds a single issue for purposes of depth and clarity, without losing sight of intersections. Participants are asked to focus on a single social identity for in-depth exploration. This focus also prevents dynamics where participants may divert attention from a topic they find challenging (white women facing the advantages of racism) to one that is less challenging (trying to shift focus to sexism). At the same time, we recognize that participants experience themselves intersectionally. Even as we focus on one ism at a time, we hold the understanding that our identities and experiences are not actually separable, and make room to explore intersections in each design.

The Importance of Critical Awareness, Knowledge, and Skills to Challenge, Resist, and Take Effective Action for Change

Important goals of SJE include helping participants recognize oppressive situations when they encounter them, and developing the knowledge and skills to take action when possible (Pasque & Harris, 2013). These goals are built into some of the core concepts addressed earlier in this chapter, such as making the transition from a “Cycle of Socialization” into a “Cycle of Liberation” using the questions in the cycle of socialization as openings for change (Harro, 2013b). Instead of feeling hopeless and overwhelmed by the pervasive and damaging impacts of oppression on entire groups of people, we want to help participants turn attention to places where they can take action to create change, both as individuals and through coalitions and networks with others (Duncan-Andrade, 2009; Tatum, 1992; West, 2004; Zúñiga, 2013). Thus, we build into our SJE curricula activities to build awareness, knowledge, skill, and practice for change.

Barbara Love has framed individual preparation as “developing a liberatory consciousness” (in homage to Freire), and she identifies awareness, analysis, action, and accountability/allyship as key ingredients for individual action (2013). Awareness and analysis involve identifying places where the normalization of systems of privilege and disadvantage should be questioned, resisted, and changed at all levels—social, cultural, institutional, and personal. As noted earlier, these often overlap.

Learning to question oneself and others, and to resist and transform hegemonic norms and oppressive practices, can take many forms. Historical accounts of past and recent people’s struggles for human and civil rights, and for equity and justice, provide powerful illustrations of how members of different social groups have struggled—for basic human rights to food, safety, shelter, minimal wage—as well as for civil rights, educational equity, immigration reform, redistribution of wealth, and against different forms of violence, including hate crimes, violence against women, and police brutality against men and women of color. One important lesson from reading and studying people’s struggles is that we must not despair. As Zinn puts it, through the study of history, “we can find not only war but resistance to war, not only injustice but rebellion against injustice, not only selfishness but self-sacrifice, not only silence in the face of tyranny but defiance, not only callousness but compassion” (2002, p. 4). Things do change as result of such struggles. The study of history can motivate and inspire people to create and sustain change.

Individuals also can learn to recognize and interrupt their own complicity in the reproduction of systems of privilege and oppression (Case, 2013; Leondar-Wright, 2005; Pittelman, 2005; Wildman, 1996; Young, 2011). As Collins (2000) observes, we often fail to see how our own values, ideas, and behaviors contribute to perpetuate someone else's mistreatment or disadvantaged location. Thus, increased knowledge and awareness of how we have been socialized to participate in the reproduction of systems of privilege and oppression is a critical first step toward envisioning and working toward social justice.

However, recognizing our role in the perpetuation of injustice versus acting on that injustice take two very different mind-sets, and moving from one to the other involves intentional steps. Love's (2013) "liberatory consciousness" outlines a path for navigating the transition from awareness to analysis, taking action and being accountable.

Participants need to develop their communication and collaborative skills and practice different ways of intervening in difficult situations. These can be practiced in classrooms and workshops through role-plays, especially if they are based on scenarios developed by participants of real-life situations in which they wish they could act.

It is often the case, however, that unjust policies and practices require more than a single individual to create and sustain change. Institutions are complex entities, and change calls for assets from multiple members of coalitions within and outside the institution or community, as well as across advantaged and disadvantaged identity groups (Anyon, 2005). The process of "action planning" proposed in all the chapter designs stresses intentional planning that includes critical analysis, collaboration, seeking multiple perspectives and information sources, and building dialogue and networks across divides. Effective change plans take into account step-by-step timelines, resources, considerations of obstacles, spheres of influence, and risk levels for participants.

Intentional planning and critical analysis include understanding how various forms of privilege and oppression are connected at the psychological, interpersonal, intergroup, structural/institutional, and global levels. This calls for self-awareness of identities and positionality among members of networks and coalitions; it values reciprocity as distinct from "do-good-ism"; it requires intergroup communication skills in order to work across differences; and it needs leadership as well as followership skills to share responsibility collaboratively. It takes a vision of the end goal, so one will know whether or not the desired change has been achieved. These challenging processes are addressed by a growing literature on intergroup dialogue and cross-identity coalitions (Gurin, Nagda & Zúñiga, 2013; Lakey, 2010; Leondar-Wright, 2014; Rose, 2000).

Activists use a range of terms to talk about change at the individual or institutional levels. *Allies* are people who work in alliance with others toward a shared goal of change. *Allies* might be members of privileged groups who are ready to leverage their privilege toward change. They might be people who have transformed disadvantage into empowerment to work on their own behalf and those of others. Other terms include *activists*, *advocates*, and *change agents*, all of whom are likely to be individuals working within *coalitions* or *networks* within communities or organizations. Change at the cultural and societal level calls for broad-based social movements (Leondar-Wright, 2014).

There are countless opportunities in our personal lives to question oppressive beliefs and discriminatory practices and policies, and to work in alliance with others to change them. For example:

- People can interrupt offensive jokes and educate friends about the impact of microaggressions.
- A teacher can incorporate social justice issues into courses not ordinarily focused on social justice.
-

A community organizer can create networks of school administrators and service providers to create continuity of support for the children of migrant workers or homeless youth.

- Men can choose to do their fair share of childcare and housework even though sexism would let them get away with not doing it, and make themselves accountable to women in their lives.
- A person with financial resources can make micro-loans to people in need, and donate money to organizations led by poor people.
- People of all ages can make commitments to practice awareness, analysis, action, and accountability in their relationships and interactions.

While the tools for creating change at the personal and interpersonal level may include our own growing awareness, knowledge, commitments, passions, and skills for interrupting oppression and the increased capacity to leverage support for social justice actions in our own sphere of influence, these tools may not be sufficient to challenge hegemonic forces at the institutional and cultural level. We can certainly take active roles in organizations and institutions to change policies and practices impacting people's lives, but we are likely to be more effective to promote change beyond personal and interpersonal contexts by engaging in collective action. Forging pathways for collective action may require understanding the role of social movements in contributing to the most durable instances of change (Pharr, 1997; Tilly, 1978). Social movement methods such as protests, strikes, sit-ins, boycotts, and informing the public of specific discriminatory policies have been historically effective in advancing social justice goals. Along with historical examples, instructors and participants should be aware of current-day alliances, coalitions, and networks that are taking effective action toward legal, structural, and economic changes (Zúñiga, 2013).

Not everyone who participates in a social justice course will choose to take action. Still, it is important that participants be equipped with the tools and skills to translate their visions and ideas into action plans, as well as to identify what may propel and sustain their motivation to act on their principles (Goodman, 2011; Zúñiga, Nagda, Chesler, & Cytron-Walker, 2007).

For example, participants can be supported to:

- Practice intergroup communication skills, including learning to listen well, express emotions, ask clarifying questions, and address conflicts across social identities;
- Recognize examples of oppression in everyday life;
- Learn to navigate oppressive dynamics with awareness, and think creatively about options for responding;
- Develop the capacity for empathy for the experiences of individuals and groups different from us;
- Analyze current and historical examples of social action, particularly of other students or young people who are so engaged;
- Develop action plans with the support of peer mentors who have had experience doing similar efforts.

The examples listed above represent essential methods and skills for translating core concepts into action, advancing social justice goals in one's spheres of influence, and engaging in the complex communication and decision-making needed to create transformative change at personal, institutional, and cultural levels. Supporting participants to find confidence and competence, inspiration, and courage for the long haul is an important goal for social justice educators.

Part 2: Sample Design for Teaching Core Social Justice Concepts

The design that follows embodies the core concepts using principles of design and facilitation from the two preceding chapters. The focus on how to teach core concepts offers a bridge from Chapter 1 to the designs in the ism chapters that follow.

The design also draws upon the pedagogical principles offered in Chapter 2. These principles are implicit in the design, and include creating an inclusive social justice learning community; attending to participant emotions as they engage with SJE concepts; emphasizing active, engaged, and collaborative learning; using activities that enable participants to connect personal experiences of their various social identities to abstract SJE concepts; and encouraging personal growth and collaborative efforts toward change. Although SJE pedagogy, design, and facilitation (like social justice theory) have already been examined in the preceding three chapters, here we provide an example of the implementation of these frameworks to help instructors and facilitators get started.

Instructors/facilitators should be aware that the core concepts are not only key content but also central to the learning process of an SJE course. The dynamics of oppression that are “out there” in the larger social world are also “in here” in learning communities. Social justice education is not a matter of abstract knowledge alone; it involves the lived experience of facilitators and participants in the class. Participants bring a range of prior experiences to social justice courses, including different levels of knowledge of and comfort with social justice content, as well as different levels of skill for self-reflection and complex thinking. The interplay of these elements within the social justice learning community requires special attention to the sequence and scaffolding of learning activities and the flexibility of design, pedagogy, and facilitation. While a repertoire of pedagogy, sequence, and facilitation strategies is used to plan ahead and anticipate potential challenges, social justice instructors and facilitators also need to remain alert and flexible to revise the anticipated sequence of activities and adapt the pedagogy as situations evolve.

This part of the chapter offers a sample four-quadrant design. It can serve as a stand-alone course or workshop that introduces the core concepts of SJE, or it can serve as the introductory segment of a single- or multiple-ism course or workshop. Whichever way this design is used, its effectiveness resides in foregrounding the core concepts. Taken together, the core concepts help us analyze various manifestations of oppression in the past and present. The ism-oriented chapters that follow this chapter, although they also present core concepts, do so in a way that is embedded in the exploration of one ism. Here, we focus attention on the core concepts as content in and of themselves. We call attention to the pedagogical and design decisions we have made so that instructors and facilitators who might want to make other choices can do so without losing sight of the core concepts that are the crux of our approach.

The general progression of the design is the following. Quadrant 1 begins by establishing a learning community with various active-learning pedagogies that enable participants to get to know each other individually. It then briefly introduces the core concepts of our SJE approach. The personal learning focus of Quadrant 2 builds on these core concepts, even though some, such as the interrelationship of “levels” (individual, institutional, cultural and societal) are not explored in depth until later. By introducing the concepts early, we help participants contextualize the personal work they will do in Quadrant 2 in developing awareness of socialization processes, social categories, social group memberships, and social identities. Quadrant 3 takes participants to the bigger picture (institutional and cultural/societal levels). The focus is on historical legacies, social construction, and analysis of current examples of oppression. Quadrant 4 focuses on “what next” by presenting frameworks and rubrics that participants can use to identify opportunities for change and develop action plans.

Part 2: Sample Design for Teaching Core Social Justice Concepts

The design that follows embodies the core concepts using principles of design and facilitation from the two preceding chapters. The focus on how to teach core concepts offers a bridge from Chapter 1 to the designs in the ism chapters that follow.

The design also draws upon the pedagogical principles offered in Chapter 2. These principles are implicit in the design, and include creating an inclusive social justice learning community; attending to participant emotions as they engage with SJE concepts; emphasizing active, engaged, and collaborative learning; using activities that enable participants to connect personal experiences of their various social identities to abstract SJE concepts; and encouraging personal growth and collaborative efforts toward change. Although SJE pedagogy, design, and facilitation (like social justice theory) have already been examined in the preceding three chapters, here we provide an example of the implementation of these frameworks to help instructors and facilitators get started.

Instructors/facilitators should be aware that the core concepts are not only key content but also central to the learning process of an SJE course. The dynamics of oppression that are “out there” in the larger social world are also “in here” in learning communities. Social justice education is not a matter of abstract knowledge alone; it involves the lived experience of facilitators and participants in the class. Participants bring a range of prior experiences to social justice courses, including different levels of knowledge of and comfort with social justice content, as well as different levels of skill for self-reflection and complex thinking. The interplay of these elements within the social justice learning community requires special attention to the sequence and scaffolding of learning activities and the flexibility of design, pedagogy, and facilitation. While a repertoire of pedagogy, sequence, and facilitation strategies is used to plan ahead and anticipate potential challenges, social justice instructors and facilitators also need to remain alert and flexible to revise the anticipated sequence of activities and adapt the pedagogy as situations evolve.

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As discussed in [Chapter 3](#), this design strives for a balance among different learning styles, between formal and informal learning modes, and between self-focused reflection and engagement with others.

Opportunities for creating such balance will differ depending on the specific needs and contexts of each set of participants and facilitators. We offer this design for illustrative purposes only, and explain (in [Part 3](#)) *how* and *why* we chose the options presented in this design, rather than suggest (incorrectly) that one size fits all. We encourage instructors and facilitators to use this design as an example of how to apply concepts of pedagogy, design and facilitation from [Chapters 2](#) and [3](#), and consider how best to embody those concepts in their own work.

Detailed activity descriptions, along with handouts and other materials needed to implement the design, are available on the [Chapter 4](#) website. Where the design calls for a lecture presentation, we have not provided a script; rather, we assume that instructors and facilitators will use content already presented in this chapter, other chapters, and/or additional sources to prepare their lecture.

Design for Teaching Core Concepts of SJE

Quadrant 1: Introductions, Learning Community, and SJE Approach

1. Welcome Activity
2. Introductions
3. Creating Learning Community
4. Comfort Zones, Learning Edges & Triggers
5. SJE Approach
6. Closing Activity

Quadrant 3: Institutional Manifestations and Historical Legacies

1. Historical Overview
2. Current Examples of Oppression
3. Web of Oppression
4. Unweaving the Web
5. Closing Activity

Quadrant 2: Cycle of Socialization, and Social Identity and Positionality

1. Check-In and Opportunity to Revisit Guidelines
2. Cycle of Socialization
3. Personal Identity and Social Identity
4. Social Group Membership, Positionality, and Intersectionality
5. Experiences of Advocacy or Empowerment
6. Closing Activity

Quadrant 4: Action and Change

1. Envisioning Change
 2. Taking Action Terminology
 3. Frameworks for Creating Change
 4. Action Continuum and Spheres of Influence
 5. Action Planning
 6. Affirmations
-

Quadrant 1: Introductions, Learning Community, and SJE Approach

Learning Objectives [content and process outcomes]:

1. Develop a collaborative and respectful learning community, based on personal and group norms and guidelines
2. Distinguish SJE approach from other approaches (such as diversity education)
3. Identify key elements of SJE approach to oppression and its manifestations at various levels and types

Key Concepts:

- Social justice, diversity, SJE
- Oppression as a structural and societal phenomenon
- Various manifestations of oppression: Levels and types
- Comfort zones, learning edges, triggers

Social group memberships, positionality, and intersectionality:

Option A: An interactive lecture presentation on these core concepts.

Option B: Participants take an individual inventory, followed by small group discussion, of situations in which they have felt advantaged or disadvantaged based on their social group memberships.

- Experiences of advocacy or empowerment: This activity encourages participants to draw on their own experiences to share personal examples of advocacy or empowerment.
- Closing activity: Opportunity to bring some closure to this segment before transitioning to a different topic, taking a break, or ending a session.

Quadrant 3: Institutional Manifestations and Historical Legacies

Learning Objectives:

1. Awareness of the multiple manifestations of oppression at different levels: Individual, institutional, and cultural, and how they intersect and reinforce each other to create a hegemonic “web” of oppression
2. Awareness of how hegemony and the “web” of oppression impacts individuals
3. Understanding of social construction and hegemony as links between historical legacies and contemporary manifestations
4. Exploration of current impacts of selected historical legacies as well as historical resistance movements
5. Understanding of current institutional examples as well as efforts toward change

Key Concepts:

- Institutional manifestations of oppression
- Concepts of social construction and hegemony
- Role of historical legacies behind current institutional manifestations
- Historical and current intersections
- Historical examples and current opportunities for resistance and change

Activities and Options:

1. Historical overview: Option A is a lecture presentation noting key episodes for each of three different isms and addressing social construction and hegemony. Option B is a group in which participants discuss key historical events related to different isms and generate examples of current-day manifestations.
2. Current examples of oppression: Both options ask participants to generate a variety of examples of contemporary manifestations of oppression. Option A uses the “levels and types” framework and Option B uses the “Five Faces of Oppression” framework.
3. Web of oppression: An interactive, kinesthetic activity demonstrating how interconnections among institutional manifestations of oppression create a ubiquitous “web.”
4. Unweaving the web: A continuation of the web of oppression focusing on its impermanence and highlighting opportunities for change.
5. Closing activity: Opportunity to bring some closure to this segment before transitioning to a different topic, taking a break, or ending a session.

Quadrant 4: Action and Change

Learning Objectives:

1. Explore some of the different pathways individuals and groups can take to envision change, plan, initiate, and create change
- 2.

Social group memberships, positionality, and intersectionality:

Option A: An interactive lecture presentation on these core concepts.

Option B: Participants take an individual inventory, followed by small group discussion, of situations in which they have felt advantaged or disadvantaged based on their social group memberships.

- Experiences of advocacy or empowerment: This activity encourages participants to draw on their own experiences to share personal examples of advocacy or empowerment.
- Closing activity: Opportunity to bring some closure to this segment before transitioning to a different topic, taking a break, or ending a session.

Quadrant 3: Institutional Manifestations and Historical Legacies

Learning Objectives:

1. Awareness of the multiple manifestations of oppression at different levels: Individual, institutional, and cultural, and how they intersect and reinforce each other to create a hegemonic “web” of oppression
2. Awareness of how hegemony and the “web” of oppression impacts individuals
3. Understanding of social construction and hegemony as links between historical legacies and contemporary manifestations
4. Exploration of current impacts of selected historical legacies as well as historical resistance movements
5. Understanding of current institutional examples as well as efforts toward change

Key Concepts:

- Institutional manifestations of oppression
- Concepts of social construction and hegemony
- Role of historical legacies behind current institutional manifestations
- Historical and current intersections
- Historical examples and current opportunities for resistance and change

Activities and Options:

1. Historical overview: Option A is a lecture presentation noting key episodes for each of three different isms and addressing social construction and hegemony. Option B is a group in which participants discuss key historical events related to different isms and generate examples of current-day manifestations.
2. Current examples of oppression: Both options ask participants to generate a variety of examples of contemporary manifestations of oppression. Option A uses the “levels and types” framework and Option B uses the “Five Faces of Oppression” framework.
3. Web of oppression: An interactive, kinesthetic activity demonstrating how interconnections among institutional manifestations of oppression create a ubiquitous “web.”
4. Unweaving the web: A continuation of the web of oppression focusing on its impermanence and highlighting opportunities for change.
5. Closing activity: Opportunity to bring some closure to this segment before transitioning to a different topic, taking a break, or ending a session.

Quadrant 4: Action and Change

Learning Objectives:

1. Explore some of the different pathways individuals and groups can take to envision change, plan, initiate, and create change
- 2.

Develop skills for planning for change in one's personal life, community, or workplace

- Understand key considerations for initiating a change plan such as: Individual and collective action, action continuum, and spheres of influence
- Consider specific frameworks for creating individual and collective change
- Plan a realistic and feasible action plan to effect change toward social justice

Key Concepts:

- Models for creating change: Liberatory consciousness, Cycle of Liberation, action continuum, and spheres of influence
- Action planning skills (identifying goals, clarifying roles, assessing risks/challenges, social support, and resources)
- Empowerment, allyship, and advocacy

Activities and Options:

1. Envisioning change: An opportunity to visualize ways of creating change in small groups and the large group.
2. Taking action terminology: Supports the development of a shared language for taking action and creating change.
3. Frameworks for creating change:
 - Option A: Uses Love's Four Elements of Liberatory Consciousness to encourage participants to think about their own agency in systems and possibilities for liberation.
 - Option B: Uses Harro's stages of the Cycle of Liberation to structure an activity focusing on self-empowerment, building community, and transforming institutions and organizations.
4. Action continuum and spheres of influence: Encourages discussion about possible action steps participants can take to begin to create changes in their personal lives and the lives of their communities.
5. Action planning: Individual and small-group activity that supports participants to generate realistic action plans.
6. Affirmations: An opportunity to affirm the learning and to bring closure to the four quadrants before transitioning to a different topic or ending the course/workshop.

Part 3: Facilitation Issues for Core SJE Concepts

An intentional SJE learning community is grounded in the principles described in the preceding chapters on theory, pedagogy, facilitation, and design. Those chapters offer different entry points as well as judgment calls in the preparation of social justice courses and workshops. This stand-alone or introductory session on core SJE concepts involves decisions about the following questions concerning sequence and facilitation:

1. Where and how to start?
2. How to build an inclusive learning community?
3. How to bring participant social identities and social positions into focus?
4. How to work with expression of emotions and challenges posed by complex ideas?
5. How to balance focusing on specific identities with acknowledging and exploring intersections?
- 6.

How to provide the knowledge and skills needed to move toward taking action for change?

- How to provide closure at the conclusion of the course/workshop? or How to transition from this opening segment of a longer course/workshop?

Where and How to Start?

In considering where best to begin a workshop or course focusing on core concepts, we draw on the principle of scaffolding (see [Chapters 2 and 3](#)) and the framework of “confirmation, contradiction, and continuity” (Kegan, 1982). An important decision for instructors and facilitators is whether to begin with “big picture” knowledge and awareness of social systems, or to start with self-knowledge and personal awareness. Factors to consider include the characteristics of the ism, the readiness of participants, and the time available. If we choose to begin with the “big picture,” we start by explaining what we mean by a social justice approach. The approach taken in this design is to start with the personal, by building community and engaging participants.

Therefore, we devote [Quadrant 1](#) to welcoming, active sharing, and community-building activities that immediately get participants engaged with each other and with the topic. This establishes that the class will be interactive and that what participants bring to the class will be part of the content for discussion. We interactively establish norms and guidelines for the learning community and introduce the concepts of comfort zones, learning edges, and triggers. Even before we introduce the SJE approach and core concepts, participants have already begun to make personal connections to the content. Once this active learning environment has been established, we can make the transition to some of the “big picture” concepts of historical legacies, social categories, social group membership, and reproduction of oppression at different levels of social organization—concepts that will be explored in greater depth in [Quadrants 2 and 3](#).

How to Build an Inclusive Learning Community?

The development and maintenance of an SJE learning community is an ongoing process that needs explicit and careful attention early and throughout the course or workshop. This is a generic process that can be adapted for any SJE course or workshops. We begin with an opening (or upon-arrival) activity that serves as a meet-and-greet or icebreaker, before the session starts officially. We go over the agenda, do logistical announcements, and introduce our frameworks and assumptions, all of which contribute to setting the tone as much as the attention paid to introductions and establishing norms and guidelines. The agenda can be a simplified form of the instructors’ session plan, such as the four-quadrant design illustrated in this chapter and the chapters that follow. Reviewing the agenda provides an opportunity for participants to see what lies ahead and to express questions or concerns, which instructors can note, and either respond to immediately or address later in an emended design. Logistical announcements should include information about the building and surroundings (where to find restrooms, food to purchase, accessibility information, etc.), approximate times when breaks will happen, and so on. This is also a good time to remind participants of the opportunity to tell instructors about any accessibility needs that have not yet been communicated.

Norms and guidelines, generated by the participants as a way of acknowledging and addressing their hopes and concerns, is one key element that should happen near the beginning. The norms and guidelines for the learning community should be based on the

desire of participants to learn and their agreement to respect each other, as well as their willingness to engage with the subject matter and take responsibility for their own learning. It should include procedures that allow participants to reflect on how the learning community is doing as the class or workshop continues (e.g., mid-way feedback forms, group process checks).

As participants propose guidelines, facilitators may need to post clarifying questions with regard to guidelines that are overly general. Often the answers to such clarifying questions reveal assumptions based in cultural, linguistic, generational, or gendered differences. For example, the indicators of listening vary across cultures. It is important to note these differences in how our various identities and experiences impact our expectations and desires for a learning environment. Facilitators should be careful not to have too many guidelines that limit or restrict communication, honesty, and difference of expression, especially differences that are likely to be connected with social identities.

In generating guidelines, participants often mention a concern about whether the course/workshop will be a “safe” place to take risks. Similarly, many participants come into SJE with worries that they will “make a mistake” and “push the buttons” of (“trigger”) someone else. Often these participants are afraid that they will be “called out” or personally attacked for saying something or repeating a stereotype they’ve heard in the popular culture (Helmreich, 1982) that is offensive and that triggers other participants.

These are learning opportunities, when everyone is outside the comfort zone and on a learning edge. Facilitators may want to repeat the distinction between safety and comfort. Participants often find it reassuring to know that although there will be times when everyone is uncomfortable, the facilitator and the participants are in agreement that no one will be personally attacked. The concepts of comfort zones, learning edges, and triggers can help to introduce the idea that discomfort is sometimes productive for learning. They can also serve as guides to help participants understand and explore their reactions to course content, activities, and other participants’ perspectives.

These discussions establish the expectation of a challenging environment in which discomfort is expected and can be a sign of growth and learning, and in which efforts to stretch oneself are supported. Facilitators can assure participants that in order to learn and grow, they need a learning environment in which mistakes can be made, difficult questions can be asked, contradictory information and experiences can be explored, and where people can find ways to support each other and draw on each other’s different experiences to expand their own knowledge, awareness, and skills (Goodman, 2011; Wasserman & Doran, 1999).

Next, we present information to participants about comfort zone, learning edge, and triggers (see Activity 4 on the website). After explaining the concepts of comfort zones, learning edges, and triggers, facilitators can invite participants to identify a process for naming triggers and being conscious of learning edges in ways that encourage open and respectful dialogue. This could be as simple as inviting participants who feel triggered or pushed beyond their learning edge to say so. Such practices can generate significant learning opportunities later on in the course.

A more practical aspect of group norms and guidelines has to do with the use of personal electronics during the course/workshop. On one hand, participants should be allowed to use devices that act as accommodations for them (e.g., in the case of participants with learning disabilities who use laptops to take notes). On the other hand, the trust of the learning community can be challenged or damaged if participants are checking their email or social networks while peers are sharing personal stories or examples of experiences with oppression. Technology should be used when it supports, rather than interrupts, participants’

ability to listen respectfully and respond meaningfully. For example, this often means that participants will use laptops during lectures, but put them away during group discussions. Participants who must read or respond to texts during a session (for example, if they have a childcare emergency) should step outside to do so, just as they would to take a phone call. In general, we find that framing this guideline as a matter of mutual respect motivates participants to minimize distracting uses of technology, because they recognize that they want to feel respected and heard when they are sharing.

Once established, the guidelines can be used as a reference point for processing group interaction throughout the course or workshop. For example, the facilitator might periodically ask the group to consider how successful they have been in adhering to the guidelines, or ask if there are guidelines participants need to add, delete, modify, or clarify.

In addition to the specific activities that serve to build a learning community in Quadrant 1 (especially establishing guidelines), facilitators' informal behavior is important. Participants will often be alert to any inconsistencies on the part of the facilitator, so it is worth making an extra effort to plan how participants will enter the room and how they will be greeted, even before the session begins. Throughout the course, community-building needs to be sustained through active facilitation of individual and group learning, sometimes including the informal interaction among participants. Community-building should be introduced intentionally, and then honored and maintained with care and attention through ongoing debriefs and closures for course or workshop segments.

How to Bring Participant Social Identities and Social Positions into Focus?

Our core concepts highlight the complex relationships between individuals' social identities and systemic patterns of oppression. The design provides many opportunities to notice and highlight these interconnections as they emerge in conversation. For example, we can help participants link someone's personal anecdote to larger institutional or cultural/societal patterns that the group has read or discussed, or we can ask the group for personal examples that illustrate institutional or cultural/societal patterns. The back-and-forth between personal and system examples enables participants to recognize these linkages in situations outside the classroom or workshop.

Many participants are unaware of the multiple ways in which they are implicated in the issues we are discussing. Some will strongly identify with one social group identity that feels vulnerable or subordinated, while others will deny or feel shame about their privileged social group identity. Many participants are unaware of the ways in which their own behaviors, communication patterns, and attitudes may reflect and reproduce some of the larger patterns of advantage and disadvantage that are discussed as course topics. People from privileged groups especially may not be aware of how they come across to others.

Facilitators can use the introductory activities in Quadrant 1 to assess participants' readiness and anticipate potential gaps in understanding and tensions in communication. Facilitators' observations about which concepts participants struggle with or get defensive about can inform decisions about how best to approach these concepts later when they are addressed in greater depth. For example, when participants are struggling with the concept of privilege, the facilitator might turn to activities listed among additional resources in [Part 2](#) of the chapter website.

The value of the experiential learning approach that we use in SJE comes from the discussion ("processing") of activities in which social identities become visible, and in which

individual participant's views on the spot. No one can focus effective attention on personal learning when they feel defensive or chastised.

There are many choices for facilitators to intervene when members experience triggers, such as stereotypes about their group, expressed by others who may be oblivious about the impact. These moments provide learning opportunities about the difference between intention and impact, the consequences of microaggressions experienced by subordinated peoples on a regular basis, and the defensiveness of privileged people when accused of wrongdoings they don't understand.

We use these difficult moments with generosity, not blame, and talk about the "learning edge" that all of us experience in such moments. We may discuss and model for participants how to give feedback in thoughtful ways. We may ask participants to tell us what kind of feedback would be most useful, or to help the group understand why the words or the situation was triggering.

Facilitators learn to share the opportunities to intervene in challenging interactions. It is not the role of the facilitator to rescue someone from other participants' responses to something they have said or done, unless there is a clear concern about safety. As a learning community matures and gains experience in honoring its own norms and guidelines, facilitators might turn to the group to ask whether there are other approaches to an idea or opinion that has been voiced. That becomes an opportunity to explore, openly, the (mis)information behind stereotypes or the socialization that led to assumptions that are now being challenged in SJE contexts.

The emotional responses that emerge during discussions of social justice are often linked to participants' prior experiences and roles in families and social systems. Participants are often not aware of beliefs or misinformation until they are challenged, and they may be surprised by the strength of emotions associated with these beliefs. Participants may get unexpectedly "triggered" or activated during the course of a discussion. Participants may react to each other in ways that are not helpful in maintaining a (safe) learning community. These are some of the reasons we emphasize the importance of clear norms and guidelines from the very beginning of a class or workshop, so that we can refer back to them as they (inevitably) become challenged or violated.

Instructors and facilitators should anticipate how they themselves feel about the public expression of feelings and emotions in classes or workshops, and to prepare for them in advance (see [Chapter 12](#)). Experienced instructors tell participants (as part of the norms and guidelines) that they will have a range of emotional (as well as cognitive) responses to this material, and ask that they offer guidelines that will help everyone through these moments. Also, the advance presentation of concepts about comfort zones, learning edges, and triggers provides maps or guideposts to help participants understand and explore their emotional reactions to class activities and other participants' perspectives (Obear, 2013).

It helps if facilitators acknowledge, upfront and early in a course or workshop, that some of the new ways of thinking are likely to challenge old ways of thinking, and that information may emerge that challenges accepted stereotypes. By alerting participants in advance, they can be better prepared for the times that will happen. Facilitators might also want to explain that SJE courses and workshops will present experiences and perspectives that contradict older ways of thinking, and that by working through these contradictions (problem-solving), participants will develop new thinking skills that will help them solve problems in other parts of their lives. These facilitative "alerts" become preemptive strikes, enabling participants to be ready and armed for challenges to outmoded or previously held world views.

Finding a Balance Between Single Ism/Identity Focus and the Intersections with Other Isms/Identities

It can be difficult to hold onto more than one ism at a time and to look at the intersection among isms, yet explorations that ignore intersectionality are incomplete. In our approach, we try to find a balance by foregrounding one ism while holding others in the background as a first step.

Facilitators can model making connections between SJE isms—keeping the focus on a specific subject while showing the connections to other subjects, and looping back to the main subject. It is often helpful to demonstrate these examples visually by drawing interconnections on the board. Facilitators can in-the-moment devise, on chalkboard or newsprint, lists of personal examples in one column and lists of institutional, cultural, societal, or historical examples on the other, and draw dotted lines to connect them. Or facilitators can ask for a free-wheeling brainstorm that they record on chalkboard or newsprint, and then ask for help in connecting various “levels” from the brainstorm. Writing is an especially useful tool to hold one thought in place while figuring out another, and offers a more grounded approach for participants who are struggling with intersectionality.

Facilitators can remind participants of their goal that participants will come away from these classes and workshops understanding the ism by having focused on it in some depth, while also appreciating that social identities and social justice issues are always complicated by their intersections at all levels and in all contexts.

Incorporating Possibilities for Action and Change

Our constructivist emphasis on the historical legacies behind current manifestations of oppression—as well as the historical legacies of resistance and change—creates numerous opportunities throughout a course or workshop to imagine change in the present that will reshape the future (Pasque & Harris, 2013). Opportunities for action and change are explored throughout our design, not only through a segment devoted to action planning toward the end (although the focused action planning activities are in Quadrant 4). Current and historical examples of social action and activism are used to inspire participants and to help imagine new possibilities as well as conceptual frameworks such as Harro’s Cycle of Liberation and Love’s Developing a Liberatory Consciousness. In some cases, facilitators may wish to start a course by imagining a different world without oppression, or they may want to integrate action planning throughout the sequence. The sequencing of action and change is an important element of course or workshop design, as is an approach to facilitation/instruction that is hopeful and explores openings for change.

In some organizational contexts, encouraging students/participants to take action may be discouraged or risky. In some individual cases, participants may not intend to take action against the forms of oppression addressed in the course/workshop. In these situations, facilitators can frame the action-focused segments as opportunities to build skills in planning and collaboration that can be useful in many different family, community, and work situations. Participants’ work in action planning will therefore be hypothetical—that is, what might you do, how might you do it, whom might you work with, what steps might you take. In other contexts, where encouraging real action is fair game, participants may actually implement their action ideas. Action projects can be woven into the design of a course and scaffolded to build the capacity for informed action and collaboration (Zúñiga, Nagda, Chesler, & Cytron-Walker, 2007).

On the continuum from action “against inclusion and social justice” to actions “for diversity and social justice,” action for positive change can take many forms—from an

understanding and analysis of one's own role (usually unrecognized and unacknowledged) in the hegemonic structures that create inequality (Young, 2011) to a willingness to engage with new social movements (Anyon, 2005). Domingue and Neely (2013) encourage instructors/facilitators to frame social action as an ongoing journey, not as one or more isolated events; to act, not to react; and to challenge themselves to re-imagine what change can be. Their key suggestions include:

- Emphasize social action at the beginning of courses or workshops, and maintain the focus throughout;
- Provide current historical examples of activism, especially by students and youth (see King, Rizga, & Palermo, 2008);
- Promote opportunities for student or community leadership and hold participants accountable;
- Provide frequent, consistent support through frequent check-ins, coaching, and celebrations of victories (Domingue & Neely, 2013).

Closure or Transition

Since participants' learning experiences about key concepts are often emotional, it is important to acknowledge the closure of this course or workshop. Even if this design is used as a segment of a longer course or workshop, the completion of the segment should be marked. Facilitators should communicate appreciation of the individual and collaborative efforts of the learning community, and express hope that participants will build on what they have learned, develop new skills, continue to take risks, and maintain the bonds they have forged.

In those cases in which this is the beginning of a longer class or additional workshops, facilitators can use the transition as an opportunity to gather feedback about what participants feel worked well for them, and what they would like to see changed as they continue in this learning community. Facilitators can also provide some continuity by previewing what is to come in the next phase of a course or series of workshops.

Note

- * We ask that those who cite this work always acknowledge by name all of the authors listed rather than either only citing the first author or using "et al." to indicate coauthors. All collaborated on the conceptualization, development, and writing of this chapter.

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